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The *Criterion:*

OR,

TOUCHSTONE,

By which to judge of the

PRINCIPLES

OF

High and *Low-Church.*

In a Letter to a Friend.

Thy Power is the beginning of Righteouſneſs, and becauſe thou art the Lord of all, it maketh thee to be gracious unto all. Wiſd. 12. 16.

LONDON:

Printed and are to be Sold by *B. Bragge* at the *Raven* in *Pater-noſter-Row.* 1710.

Price One Peny.

AC 911.1710.F72

SIR,

I Have often obſerv'd, whenever the Subject of Converſation has turn'd upon the Principles in Controverſy, between *High* and *Low Church*, either relating to Religion or Politicks, your Wiſh has been for a *Criterion* between the Two Parties, by which, even the meaneſt Capacity of either, may ſatisfy himſelf, which makes the neareſt approaches to Truth, ſeeing both have their formidable Champions, and both pretend to be poſſeſt of it. This Wiſh of yours has procur'd you the trouble of this Letter, containing my Teſt, by which to judge of the Truth of moſt Opinions, the belief, or disbelief of which are, by the Learned Contenders for them, charg'd upon the Conſcience. How far it may be of Service to others I know not.

I have this ſhort Soliloquy: If I am in Conſcience oblig'd to the Belief or Practice of any thing, the Obligation muſt ariſe from its being requir'd, or not requir'd: or, which is all one, its being agreeable, or diſagreeable to the Will of the Deity; and ſeeing the Champions on both ſide the Queſtion, aſſert, That God, both by Reaſon aud Revelation, is on their ſide, (which I know is impoſſible to be true) What then muſt I do, to take my Mind from this *Equilibrium*? I preſently have recourſe to my Idea of God, and whatever Doctrine I find inconſiſtent with that Idea, ſuch a Doctrine muſt, to me, be falſe. Being got thus far, I have nothing more to do, but to conſider, with all the Exactneſs I can, the natural Conſequences ariſing from either ſide of the Queſtion; and that which ſeems moſt conſiſtent with my Notion of the Deity, muſt command my Aſſent.

My Idea of God then ſuppoſe is, That he is a Self-exiſtent eternal Spirit, of infinite Power, Wiſdom, Goodneſs, Truth, and Juſtice. Any Doctrine or Opinion, deſtructive of any part of this Idea, muſt neceſſarily appear to me falſe; as long as I retain this Notion of the Deity, even tho' it be pretended to be drawn from what God himſelf has Reveal'd.

For Inſtance, As long as I believe that God is a Spirit, I can never believe that he has Eyes, Ears, and Hands, tho' the Scripture, literally taken, declare he has. What muſt I do then? Muſt I not believe what God reveals? Yes, but ſtill with regard to the Rule, by putting ſuch a Meaning to the Expreſſions, as are conſiſtent with the Notion I have of a Spirit, and then I ſhall preſently quit the Letter, and conſider, That there are ſuch Ways of Speaking and Writing, as are call'd Figures, Metaphors, and the like, many times made uſe of for the better convenience of Truths to uncultivated Underſtandings; by which the Eye of God changeth into his Omnipreſence, and his Arm into his Omnipotence; ſo that now I can firmly believe what is Reveal'd, conſiſtently with my Idea of God's being a Spirit.

To inſtance further, in that mighty controverted Doctrine of Predeſtination. Which way can I, an unlearned Man, altogether unacquainted with the Languages in which the Original Scriptures were wrote, and thereby uncapable of knowing whether what one Learned Doctor tells me, that ſuch is the true meaning of the Text in the Original, and therefore 'tis evident that Predeſtination, in his ſence, *viz.* The abſolute Decree of God from all Eternity to ſave ſome particular Perſons and damn others, is true. Another, equally Learned, tells me, That they who put ſuch a ſence did not well attend to the drift and deſign of

of the Writer, and that the Text he ſo much inſiſts upon, is to be explain'd by a parallel one, That ſuch a Word is never us'd throughout the Scriptures in that ſence; and that there are ſeveral expreſs Declarations therein of God, to the contrary. Now when I have heard both theſe Learned Dogmatiſts, I know no eaſier Way of ſettling my Mind, than having recourſe to my Rule; and that makes it evident, that as long as I believe God to be a Being of infinite Juſtice and Goodneſs, 'tis impoſſible to believe abſolute Election and Reprobation, a Doctrine altogether inconſiſtent with thoſe two Attributes; for indeed (as a moſt excelleut Divine has well obſerv'd) 'tis impoſſible to ſpeak worſe of the Devil; and therefore, ſure, no way reconcilable with the Idea of God.

Having now, briefly, by two Inſtances, illuſtrated the uſe of my Rule, I ſhall now, more largely, apply it to the Controverſy I firſt mention'd. In order to which, it will be neceſſary that I firſt ſet down the Principles of the Two Parties, in relation to Religion and Government; and the Conſequences or Tendency of thoſe Principles; and then it will be no difficult Matter to ſhew, which are moſt conſiſtent with our Idea of God, ſuppoſing my Readers Idea to be the ſame with mine.

To begin then with the *Tories* or *High-Church*. They believe, That the Prince deriveth his Right of Government from God immediately, and therefore to God only is accountable for any of his Actions, which, if never ſo extravagant, muſt meet with no oppoſition from any of his Subjects. That Conſcience is likewiſe ſubject to his abſolute Authority, ſo far as to be oblig'd to uniformity in Worſhip; for ſupport of which they bring ſeveral Texts of Scripture.

The *Whigs*, or *Low-Church* hold, That God hath

made Man such a Creature as naturally to dispose him for Society: That the Inconveniences of Society, without Government, are so many, that it quickly brings them to enter into such Pacts as they think will best serve the End of all Political Societies, *viz.* The better securing the Lives and Properties of every Individual. And thus may Government (abstractedly consider'd, they say) be said to be of Divine Right; but the particular Modes or Species of Government are left wholly to Mankind. That this must necessarily be the Origin of Political Authority, they think is evident from all Mens being born equal. That God has the sole Authority over Conscience, and therefore 'tis the natural Right of all Mankind to have the Liberty of Worshipping God in that Way which they think most acceptable to him, in order to their better securing their everlasting Happiness. The evidence of which they think so clear, from the Light of Nature, that nothing but the Authority of Scripture could any way oppose; therefore they have shewn, that those Texts brought to favour the contrary Opinions are fairly capable of another sence; and that there was no design in the Scripture Writers to settle the Form of Government, or the Power of Governors.

I know, Sir, you must agree, that I have not fix'd a wrong Creed upon either of the Parties; but if any should make a doubt, I could easily bring abundant Testimonies from the Writings of both.

Having now set down their Principles, I shall proceed with as strict Impartiality in deducing the Consequences.

Those of the first are, That the Supreme Magistrate in every Monarchy (for with them there are no Legal Republicks) is absolute: From hence it must needs be, that there can't be a limited Monarchy, but all are exactly equally Despotick; that

that is, That the Subjects of every Monarch in the World were made ſolely for his Uſe and Pleaſure here, as much as my Dog or Horſe are for mine. If it be ſaid, That the Magiſtrate muſt take care ſo to act towards thoſe thus ſubjected to his Will, as not to endanger his own future State of Happineſs. 'Tis anſwer'd, So ought the Thief and Murderer; but yet, I believe, it will readily be agreed by both Parties, that there need ſome further reſtraint upon them, to prevent their committing ſuch Crimes, than what will ariſe from their own Reflexions; and therefore, till it can be ſhewn, that Kings are not ſubject to the like Paſſions and Irregularities as their Subjects; or, that all Hiſtories agree, that there never was a wicked Prince, nothing can be more reaſonable, than that they ſhould be reſtrain'd from doing Ill as well as the reſt of Mankind, unleſs God has forbid any ſuch Reſtraint, which is what is to be conſider'd at the Concluſion.

Further, Hereby the Subject is excluded from all manner of Property in relation to the Prince; for if I am his Property, all that I can call mine, muſt be his likewiſe.

As to Religious Matters, the Conſequences are evidently theſe: That they muſt make true Religion very precarious, and that more regard ought to be had to Uniformity than Sincerity in Religious Worſhip.

That true Religion will be rendred hereby very precarious, is evident from the uncertainty of Princes being of like Minds in Religion, who ſucceed each other on the Throne: And if they ſhould differ, then what was true Religion in the Laſt Reign, is falſe in This, and all the Subjects oblig'd to Change, in conformity to their Prince, at leaſt in appearance. If it be ask'd, Whoever aſſerted any ſuch thing? 'tis anſwer'd, That 'tis

the natural consequence of that Principle, That Conscience is under the Authority of the Magistrate, so far as to oblige to Uniformity. If it be ask'd further, Who held such a Principle? The Answer will be, Bishop *Parker*, in his *Ecclesiastical Polity*, and every one else who are against Liberty of Conscience, which, Dr. *Sacheverel* says, can't be vindicated but only by *False-brethren*.

So that when good K. *Cha.* II. (if he had made a right use of the Power the Gentlemen of these Principles had invested him with) had brought us all to be good Sons and Daughters of the *Church of England*, at least in appearance; and we had sometime walk'd in this direct Pathway to Heaven, e're he goes before us, and is succeeded by K. *J.* who being no less zealous for the future Happiness of his Subjects obliges them to a Conformity with his Religion, as being a much safer Way than what they were in before. And tho' some of his Subjects, pursuant to their Principles, presently turn into the Royal-Road, yet many of them may be of a different Opinion, and may think themselves to be very safe, as they are, and upon it beg leave to take care of their own Souls, and that they may be permitted to continue in their old Way, which they doubt not is the right, because they find those Marks in it, which those, who infallibly knew, told them they must meet with. This seems to be a reasonable Request, but the King tells them, they are a parcel of Bigots, and easy to be impos'd upon, he knows better; That they are so far from being in the direct Road to Happiness, that it leads to Misery; and therefore having such a Kindness for them, he'll make them sensible of it in *Smithfield*, if they don't immediately turn out. This Answer to their Petition can do no less than produce Conviction in the Mind, but if there should be any so obstinate,

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as to go about to make out, that Mankind has a Natural Right of purſuing thoſe Methods they think moſt effectual to procure eternal Happineſs, ſuch an one can be only a *Falſe-Brother*.

Having thus given an Inſtance, only to illuſtrate the Conſequence of their Principles, I ſhall now do them the Juſtice to mention what they have from Reaſon, to ſay in Vindication of them, ſo far as is conſiſtent with my Deſign, which is not to diſcuſs the Queſtion in Controverſy, but only juſt to mention what is aſſerted by both Parties, without entring far into the detail of the Arguments; ſo that having both in view, we may the eaſier perceive which have the greateſt Conformity to the Idea abovemention'd.

Not only the Scriptures, they ſay, but Reaſon tells us, that we ought not, upon any Account whatever, to reſiſt the Commands of the Sovereign, becauſe 'tis impoſſible for the Sovereign to be Subject in any caſe: 'tis a contradiction in the very Terms. Again, If they may in any Caſe be reſiſted, as in Tyranny or the like, Who ſhall judge whether his Actions are ſuch as ought to be oppos'd? If every one is left to judge for himſelf, what a pretty Condition are the Prince and the Government in, when every ignorant Fellow ſhall ſet himſelf up for a Judge in State Affairs; and if they be not manag'd according to the Model in his wiſe Brain, then he finds Fault, cries out of Male-adminiſtration, procures Abettors, and, by their Aſſiſtance, endeavour to overturn the Government, and bring it into thoſe Miſeries that attend Anarchy and Confuſion.

The Reaſons they urge to oblige all to Uniformity in Worſhip are, That Mankind are in nothing ſo zealous, as for their Religious Opinions, and that makes them very deſirous of getting the Power of Government into their Hands, that they

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may have theirs eſtabliſhed. And this Zeal likewiſe puts them upon Conteſts in vindication of the Truth of their ſeveral Opinions; which Conteſts, and the deſire of Power, muſt very much endanger the State; and therefore it were much better that all ſhould be of one Mind, and then there would be no Foundation for Party-Feuds and Animoſities, thoſe Seed-Plots of Rebellion. And then again, there is nothing requir'd in order to Conformity with the Church of *England*, that is in itſelf ſinful, and therefore to diſſent is only Obſtinacy.

The Anſwers to theſe ſeveral Reaſons will appear in the Conſequences of the *Low-Church* or *Whig* Principles. The firſt is, That if the Origin of Government be, as they ſay, then 'tis plain, That the End of all Political Societies is the good of the Community; ſo that in entring into it they can't be conceivld to inveſt any Perſon or Perſons with ſuch Power as to render their Lives and Properties leſs ſafe than in the State of Nature; and therefore that there ought to be fix'd Rules in every ſuch Society, call'd Laws, by which every one may know how to conduct himſelf; ſo that if he be not guilty of the Breach of any of theſe Laws, he can't, by any Power in ſuch a Society, be puniſh'd; If he ſhou'd, it wou'd be an Arbitrary Tyrannical Act, 'tis laying aſide the common Meaſure of every Individual, even from the ſupream Magiſtrate to the meaneſt Subject; and if often repeated will give a general Alarm, every one will be apt to think it may be his own Caſe next, and therefore 'twill put thoſe Subjects who are of greateſt Power upon uniting their Force, to try if they can't ſtem this Torrent of Oppreſſion, and bring the Society to its old State of Safety, by re-eſtabliſhing this common Meaſure.

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From hence, ſay the *Whigs*, 'tis eaſy to reconcile Sovereignty and Subjection in the ſame Perſon or Perſons; for He, or They may be inveſted with the ſupream Executive Power, tho' not Legiſlative, becauſe in the firſt, he has the ſame Director with every one of his Subjects, *viz.* The Law, and conſequently, that in all well-regulated Governments both theſe Powers ought not to be ſolely in one Hand. They think it no leſs eaſy to anſwer that common Queſtion of the other Party, Who ſhall be judge of the Actions of Sovereigns? The *Whigs* ſay, The People. Say you ſo, they reply, the Prince have a fine time of it, if the Mob, the conceited Mechanick, ſhall judge of Reaſons of State, and approve or condemn his Actions; this muſt needs tend to the Safety of a State, when every illiterate Fellow may, without the Checks of Conſcience, endeavour to overturn it.

This Objection to their Scheme, the *Whigs* think ſo weak that they ſuppoſe (in favour of thoſe who uſe it) 'tis only the plauſibility of it have made it been urg'd ſo often, in hopes of gaining an inconſiderate Reader; for is it not clear, that every one muſt have this Right of judging the Actions of others relating to himſelf? If a Lord do's commit any act that is injurious to his Plebean Neighbour, is not he a proper judge whether his Fences be broke, or his Servant abus'd, becauſe the Perſon committing the Offence was ſo far above him in Quality: Indeed if there be no real Injury done, but the Fellow will be fanciful, and ſuppoſe there is, let him take his Remedy at Law, and ſee what he will get by it; Let him ſee, that finding Fault without a Cauſe is the direct Road to Ruin. And then he needs no checks of Conſcience to keep him from ſuch Conteſts. But the Prince is ſtill in a much ſafer con-

condition. For if any Subject tho' never so great think himself injur'd by his Prince, and perhaps really is so, yet if it be his Case alone, and that 'tis very rarely that the Prince deviate from the common Rule, the Law, He may attempt to relieve himself in vain, He'll find but few Assistants, unless amongst his dependants; so that if he proceed to Hostilities, it must inavoidably terminate in his Ruin; a sufficient Consideration to keep him within bounds, how much less then are the Inferior ones able to effect any Revolutions in Government, so that 'tis evident this Argument can be made use of only as a Childish-Bugbear, and can't have any force but only with such Understandings.

This Scheme then is so far from rendring the Prince unsafe upon his Throne, that it has a direct tendency to the contrary, because he has his safety always in his own Power, he has nothing to do but to pursue the Publick Good, (the end for which he possesseth that Post) and it is impossible for any Rebellious Attempts ever to succeed. For when those at Helm pursue the publick Welfare, it is so generally seen, and felt, that none but Mad-Children would rise up against such truly nursing Parents, and it would be hard to suppose the Majority under such a fatal Lunacy.

In answer to the Political Reasons urg'd against Liberty of Conscience, the Whigs say, that Evil is not to be done that Good may arise from it.

That it is an Evil to punish Persons for not acting contrary to their Consciences, no doubt can be made, tho' what is requir'd to be done be really in itself Innocent, and Lawful, for 'tis not what the Act is in itself, nor what sence the Imposer have of it, but what he who is to perform it thinks of it, is what is to be minded: For otherwise, the *Roman-Catholicks* have the same

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Plea againſt all the Reform'd, that 'tis only their Humour, and Obſtinacy, which makes them ſeparate from their Safe-Church, for they require nothing ſinful, nothing but what 'tis their Duty to comply with.

And whereas it is further pleaded by the other ſide; That the Zeal of Sects for their ſeveral Religions, make them puſh at Power, every one being deſirous of getting it into their own hands, in order to Eſtabliſh their own Way, to the endangering the Publick Peace. They think this Argument, if rightly purſu'd, would plead ſtrongly in behalf (of what 'tis brought againſt) Liberty of Conſcience. Becauſe if every Man have ſo great a Zeal for his own Way, 'tis becauſe he thinks it the ſafeſt to Heaven, which makes him deſirous that he, nor his Poſterity, may never be forc'd out of it. Which thought indeed makes him deſire Power in the Hands of his Party, but 'tis only that it may be eſtabliſh'd, ſo as no other may have the Power of perſecuting him for his Religious Opinions. And therefore were Liberty of Conſcience ſo ſettl'd, as that one Party never would oppreſs, or perſecute another, but all equally ſhare in the publick Advantages, what occaſion would there then be to contend for Power, when all are equally ſafe in what hands ſoever it be? Such an amiable Toleration, would then be ſo far from endangering the State, that nothing would ſo ſtrongly Cement us againſt a Foreign Enemy, which would be the only one we could there have, or need to fear.

Having thus, my Friend, with all the Brevity I could, ſet down the Principles, the Conſequences, and the Reaſons of both Parties, I have nothing more to do (in order to adhere to one ſide) but to conſider which ſet of Principles is moſt likely to be authorized by God.

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In order to which, let us consider, whether it be consistent with the Idea of our Infinitely Good Being, who has declar'd that his Mercy is over all his Works, to order that all Mankind (except some few endow'd with no natural Advantages above the rest) should be in a State of perpetual Slavery both in Body and Mind, and this for no real advantage to them either here or hereafter.

Or whether, on the other hand, there appear not greater Consistency, that he should allow Mankind perfect Liberty, as far as is consistent with the Safety of Government, Liberty being a Blessing so valuable, so deeply implanted in our Natures, that nothing (as long as we have a Being) can eradicate it. The very Advocates for Slavery, plead as strongly as any for it, in their Actions, nothing but their Writings appear against it. Is it not the voice of Nature as well as Revelation (and therefore doubly a Command of that God who gives himself the Title of Love,) That we should do that to every one, as we would be done by? And is it consistent with this Rule, for one to persecute another, only for worshiping God that way he thinks most acceptable? is that a Crime worthy to be punish'd by the Magistrate? What notion must such Men have of God, that think he is better pleas'd with the Modes than the Esteem of Religion, with Conformity than Morality, with praying for Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, than in Acts of Kindness, and Humanity towards them. And tho' he lets his Rain descend, and his Sun shine upon the Unjust as well as Just, yet he would not be imitated in this universal Benificence.

And pursuant to their several Principles, you find one Party continually declaiming against Moderation, full of uncharitable Thoughts of their Neighbours, representing all that differ from them,

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as Hippocrites, that make pretences to Religion only as a Cloak, that they may the better bring about their Mischievous Designs; and all they who come not up to the same pitch of violence, with themselves are proclaim'd to be *False-Brethren.* Whereas the Other are always in their Writings pleading for Moderation, Charity, Humanity and universal Justice, without regard to Parties. That all impartially partake of the Benefits of that Government under which they live, as long as they behave themselves in such Manner as the Laws require.

Now, which of these makes the neareſt Approaches to Justice and Goodness, could not hold me in Suspence, but quickly determin'd me to the Latter. If this Method do not carry the same Evidence with it to your obliging Neighbour, with whom, you say, you have often some little Disputes on this Subject; if it makes no Alterations in his Thoughts (as I almost despair it should) considering with whom he has so often convers'd, without being a Convert, assure him, that I shall not have him in less Esteem, but shall always desire, that neither He, nor any one else, may ever be compel'd to deny or suffer for that, which he at the same time firmly believes.

I am,

SIR,

Your real Friend and humble Servant